

# **FIRST PLACE WINNER**

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When I was first assigned this essay, I was absolutely lost. As a 13-year-old Chinese-American girl living in Seattle, Washington in 2013, I didn't think that Martin Luther King's legacy had any impact on my life. But now I realize how close minded I was being. MLK stood for more than simply the eradication of segregation based on race. He stood for peace, justice, dedication and hard work to accomplish a goal and achieve a dream. It is the idea of dedication, in the name of achieving a goal, that has a profound impact on my life.

Martin Luther King's legacy of hard work and dedication to a cause, that he strongly believed in, is easily assimilated to my life as a competitive swimmer. I am dedicated to my team. I work hard to make time standards, and I work hard to improve technique. But not only do I work hard for myself, because I want to do well and improve, I contribute to my team and community through swimming in multiple ways.

Every day, about ten people die from unintentional drowning. Of these, two are children aged 14 or younger. These statistics have always appalled me, so this summer, I decided to do my part. Every summer there is a program called "Get Wet" at the pool that I swim at, run by my swim coach. This program is targeted at kids who would normally never be able to swim. It's open to anyone who walks through the pool doors, free of charge. Most of the younger kids who come have no swimming ability whatsoever. This summer I volunteered to help teach four, five, and six year olds how to swim. After three weeks with the program, young kids, from all different backgrounds, had learned this important life skill.

Even though I did not lead the Civil Rights Movement, my small and seemingly insignificant job impacted someone, other than myself, in a positive way. I learned that by doing the little things, like volunteering for a cause I am committed to, I could make a big difference in

somebody's life. Whether I realized it at first or not, Martin Luther King's Legacy is alive and thriving in me.

Every year my swim team, Central Area Aquatic Team, has a swim challenge and all swimmers are expected to participate by asking people to pledge a certain amount of money for every lap we swim. All of the swimmers go around knocking on doors, sending emails, and calling up old family friends asking for donations. We all raise money for swim scholarships for kids who would otherwise not be able to afford to swim on CAAT. Taking part in this swim challenge is incredibly important to all of us because we know, first hand, how much swimming has the power to change a life.

However, it can be embarrassing and even humbling to go around asking for money from people I barely know, but when I think of how CAAT has influenced the course of my life, I make it my goal to make sure others can experience the love and dedication that goes with swimming on a swim team like mine. In this way, Martin Luther King's legacy of hard work and dedication to a cause he believed in, effects me in my life some fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement.

"Work for a cause, not for applause. Live life to express not to impress. Don't strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt." I believe that MLK and I can both strongly relate to this quote from anonymous because I have always been impressed by MLK's dedication and self sacrifice to achieve change in a cause he was devoted to.

As I've grown older, I've noticed that many people live life for the grand gestures, for the awards, and certificates. They do not see the value in a small contribution or do not feel satisfaction from the knowledge that a good deed has been done with the best effort possible. But if Martin Luther King's legacy has taught me anything, it is that even the smallest action is

invaluable. He did not lead the Civil Rights Movement because he wanted recognition, he lead this movement because he cared about getting equal rights for all African-Americans.

Even when the going got tough, MLK kept going. He didn't give up, or break down. Ever. Not when his home was bombed and set afire on January 30, 1956, and not when he was arrested for protesting segregation at the Monson Motor Lodge in St. Augustine, Florida on June 18, 1964. As an impressionable 13-year-old girl, I have always been astounded by his devotion and utter commitment to a cause he truly believed in.

I have consistently wondered how a nobody from Atlanta, Georgia could become a world leader, a force of good and a symbol of peace, justice, and equality. But from Dr. King, I have learned that it is not because of the grand gestures, that made him who he was, a powerful leader who helped shape society, but it was from the small seemingly insignificant ones, undertaken with painstaking excellence.

Even if all we can contribute is a ten dollar donation from the neighbor we barely know from down the street, it is all of our responsibilities to do all that it is in our power to accomplish this task with dignity and painstaking excellence. Martin Luther King was a man of courage and strength who held to his dreams, because he knew he could make them into reality. *Martin Luther King's* legacy lives inside me, but hopefully what he has taught me will help shape *me* into someone who can achieve a similar thriving legacy.

## Bibliography

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